

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE
EASTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA

Alexandria Division

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)	
)	
v.)	Criminal No. 1:18-CR-410-LMB
)	
SEITU SULAYMAN KOKAYI,)	
)	
Defendant.)	Trial: April 8, 2019

**GOVERNMENT’S MOTION IN LIMINE SEEKING
QUALIFICATION OF OROMO INTERPRETER**

The United States of America respectfully moves *in limine* under Rules 104(a) and 604 of the Federal Rules of Evidence to qualify Mr. Mergia Y. Sonessa as an Oromo to English, and English to Oromo, court interpreter. The government provided notice to counsel on March 25, 2019, of its intention to rely on Mr. Sonessa’s interpretation services at the trial in this matter. The March 25 notice included Mr. Sonessa’s current resume and a description of his background and qualifications in the interpretation of Oromo to English and English to Oromo. Mr. Sonessa is prepared to “give an oath or affirmation to make a true translation” in this matter. FRE 604. “[A] presumption of propriety should accompany a court interpreter in the performance of his or her official duties.” *Michel v. United States*, 849 F.Supp. 2d 649, 656 (W.D.Va. March 28, 2012).

In addition to Mr. Sonessa’s resume, the government provided the following summary of his background and qualifications as well as anticipated role in the trial in its March 25, 2019, notice:

Mr. Sonessa is a registered Amharic and Oromo interpreter with the judiciary in the State of Washington. Mr. Sonessa regularly appears in court proceedings in Seattle, Washington, and the surrounding jurisdictions for the purpose of interpreting Amharic and Oromo to English, and

English to Amharic and Oromo. Mr. Sonessa was registered by the State of Washington as an Amharic interpreter in December 2009. He was registered as an Oromo interpreter in September 2017. Mr. Sonessa has also worked as a contract linguist for the FBI since November, 2017.

Amharic and Oromo are two primary languages of Ethiopia. Amharic is the official language of Ethiopia, but Oromo is the language spoken by the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. Mr. Sonessa was born to an Oromo family so his first language is Oromo. Mr. Sonessa began learning the English language in grade school in Ethiopia at approximately age 8. The English language is used extensively in the Ethiopian educational curriculum. By the time Mr. Sonessa reached high school, most of his coursework was conducted in English. Mr. Sonessa is fluent in the English language as well as Oromo. Mr. Sonessa's academic background includes studies in science disciplines in Israel, Ireland, Belgium and the United States.

Mr. Sonessa is trained and has experience with simultaneous interpretation as well as consecutive interpretation. We anticipate Mr. Sonessa will serve as the in-court interpreter for a government witness (the Father of the victim in this case). Mr. Sonessa will interpret English questions, as well as directions or comments from the Court, into Oromo, and then interpret the Oromo responses into English.

Respectfully submitted,

G. Zachary Terwilliger
United States Attorney

By: /s/
Kellen S. Dwyer
Dennis M. Fitzpatrick
Assistant United States Attorneys
Joseph Attias
Special Assistant United States Attorney
Office of the United States Attorney
2100 Jamieson Avenue

Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone: 703-299-3700
Kellen.Dwyer@usdoj.gov

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on March 29, 2019, I filed the foregoing with the Clerk of Court using the CM/ECF system, which will send an electronic copy to all counsel of record in this matter.

By: /s/
Dennis M. Fitzpatrick
Assistant United States Attorney
Eastern District of Virginia
United States Attorney's Office
2100 Jamieson Avenue
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
Phone: 703-299-3700